

## POLISH AMERICAN FOUNDATION HUMANITARIAN AWARD

### DR. WILLIE WILSON

Dr. Willie Wilson is founder of Dr. Willie Wilson Foundation whose mission is simple... To serve the least of these

Philanthropist, entrepreneur, and recording artist Willie Lee Wilson recently gained notoriety after earning nearly 11 percent of the votes in the 2015 Chicago mayoral election. Wilson's candidacy sparked an historic run-off election and secured his place in the Windy City's rich political history.

Wilson was born on June 16, 1948 in Gilbert, Louisiana. He grew up in impoverished conditions and rose to develop multiple successful enterprises throughout his life. Wilson is a 56-year resident of Chicago, having moved to the city in 1965 where he began his life's legacy. In 1970, Wilson was hired by McDonald's to do custodial work for \$2 an hour. He was awarded the opportunity to run the establishment when disgruntled employees walked out and he was asked to stay on when the former managers returned.

After working with McDonald's for 10 years, Wilson decided he wanted to open a McDonald himself and resolved to meet with McDonald's founder Ray Kroc. He agreed to give Wilson a suffering McDonald's restaurant in 1979, and with capital provided by South Shore Bank, Wilson turned it around within a year. Wilson earned several honors from McDonald which led to owning several franchises in the Chicago area.

In 1987, Wilson turned his attention to owning a television production company, Willie Wilson Productions. This was the first nationally syndicated African-American owned and produced Gospel program on commercial television that broadcast internationally on WGN-TV. In 1988, he was moved to pursue his faith after hearing the song, "What Shall I Render Unto the Lord?" at his church. He sold his McDonald's restaurants to dedicate his life to Gospel music and started doing church solos and singing with the Norfleet Brothers. He created several albums: I'm So Grateful, Lord Don't Let Me Fail, Just A Closer Walk With Thee, Through It All, Somewhere Listening, and I'll Fly Away.

In 1989, Wilson's Singsation! premiered, a half-hour weekly program of Gospel music produced by his television production corporation. Singsation! is regularly hosted by Wilson and is available in over 60 million households every Sunday. A gifted singer, Wilson earned an Emmy Award in 2012.

Still holding entrepreneurial ambitions, in 1997, Wilson founded Omar Medical Supplies, one of America's fastest growing distributors of disposable products for use in medical, industrial, and foodservice areas. Omar has sourcing offices with employees in the United States, as well as in Shanghai and Beijing, China. The company's client roster includes diverse organizations from around the world.

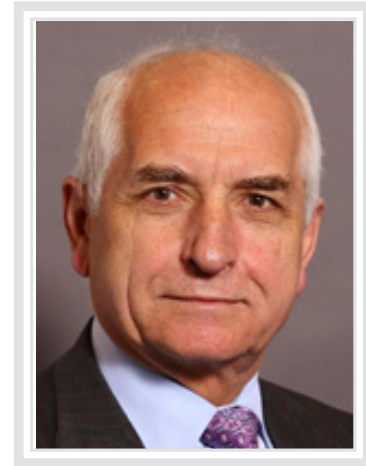
Wilson is the recipient of a Doctorates from Mt. Carmel Theological Seminary, the Chicago Baptist Institute, International, the Swisher Bible College and from the Denver Institute of Urban Studies and Adult College. In November 2003, the Illinois State House of Representatives adopted resolution HR0491 in the 93rd General Assembly to honor Wilson's successes as a member of the National Black McDonald's Owner Operator Association and his contributions to his community.

Wilson is the author of two books which are available at <http://www.drwilliewilsonbooks.com/>. His 2008 autobiography What Shall I Do Next When I Don't Know Next What to Do? And the 2015 manuscript Lies, Tricks & Politics, which details his historic Chicago mayoral race.

He is the current chairman of the Trustee Board of Chicago Baptist Institute International. Wilson continues to reside in Chicago with his wife of 18 years.

## HERITAGE AWARD

### MAREK RUDNICKI, MD, PHD, DSC



Marek Rudnicki, MD, PhD, DSc received his medical degree from Medical University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland (1972). After his surgery residency with the same institution, he was invited to continue his pioneering work on enteropancreatic interactions at the University of Cincinnati and Columbia University, New York. Dr. Rudnicki moved to Chicago in 1999 where he was appointed Professor of Surgery at The University of Illinois at Chicago. In 2002, he accepted the position of Site Program Director at Univ. of Illinois/Metropolitan Group Hospitals Residency Program in Surgery. He has trained more than 200 surgery residents in Poland and in the US, lectured and published extensively all over the world focusing on gastrointestinal diseases, healthcare, and medical education.

Currently, he is Professor and Chairman of the Dept. of Surgery at Ross University School of Medicine. He serves as the Governor at the American College of Surgeons, is fellow of the Kosciuszko Foundation Collegium of Eminent Scientists. He is an active member of multiple professional organizations in the United States and Poland. He chairs the International Scientific Board of the monthly medical journal "Wiadomosci Lekarskie".

Professor Rudnicki co-founded the Solidarity organization at the Medical University of Silesia and worked in different capacities at the Solidarity regional and national committees. He was an active member of the anti-communist opposition.

In Chicago, he became recognized for his anti-defamatory interventions, including organizing a successful, world-wide campaign against the media which falsified history and deceptively named German's Nazi concentration camps as "Polish". During several radio interviews in the US, he spoke against discrepancies between the accurate history and the incorrect renditions currently promoted by various media outlets surrounding the Second World War and the Polish contribution.

Dr. Rudnicki has served as advisor to Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland. In acknowledgment of his activities and contributions to different aspects of the Polish Communities in the US, he was nominated to the Polonia Advisory Council to Speaker of the Senate, Republic of Poland, being one of two representatives of the US in the Council. He was nominated to run for Senate of the Republic of Poland. Currently, he serves on the "Wspolnota Polska" Patronage Board as the only member from outside of Poland.

He is a well-known physician and surgeon in Chicago. He founded Amber Coalition in 2002, a Polish American Breast Cancer Awareness Program. For the last 20 years, he has been very active in the international activities of Polish medical communities. He has served over two terms as the President of the World Federation of Polish Medical Organizations and organized three World Congresses of Medical Polonia. He initiated and organized International symposium "Integration of Medical Subspecialties" and a very well received two conferences "Patriotism, Heritage and Medicine". In years 2018 – 2020 while serving as the President of the Polish American Medical Society in Chicago he spearheaded efforts to educate the Polish American community about Covid-19 pandemic at its onset, organized educational programs, radio talk shows, co-organized visit of Polish Military physicians to Chicago, organized world-wide conferences on Covid-19 and its prophylaxis.

In addition to his multiple recognitions, he was awarded with Cavalier's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland and the Cross of Freedom and Solidarity by the President of Poland. He has received the Golden Medal Ecclesiae Populoque Servitium Praestanti and an honorary Medal from the Polish Government "For defense of Human Rights".

In 2015 Dr Rudnicki received the President's Award of the Polish-American Congress in Illinois. The Polish medical organizations awarded him with their highest recognitions Gloria Medicinae, Pro Gloria Medici, Prof. Nielubowicz Golden Medal, Honorary Bieganski Statue. He received "Golden Otis" award and medal "Honoris Gratia".

Dr Rudnicki is married to his lovely wife Joanna for many years, has two children and two grandchildren.

## HERITAGE AWARD

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## POLISH AMERICAN MEDICAL SOCIETY

It is with great honor and gratitude that we accept this year's Heritage Award bestowed upon us by the Polish American Congress Illinois Division.

Established in 1946, the Polish American Medical Society has grown to be the largest and most influential professional organization of physicians, dentists, and veterinarians outside of Poland. As a Society strongly embedded in the life of Polonia, we pride ourselves in a long tradition of helping, educating, and treating the Polish community. Our authority has become an undeniable open path to success to the many adepts of medical professionals. The Polish American Medical Society stays strong in the Polish traditions, cultivating its relationships with other professional organizations in the United States, Poland, and all over the world. The members of our Society are well-recognized specialists emanating with competence, philanthropy, and friendship.

The Heritage Award is a prestigious recognition of our mission and accomplishments. As the President of the Polish American Medical Society along with the Board of Directors and our Members, I would like to acknowledge our appreciation for such distinction.

Peter Brukas, MD

*President*

Polish American Medical Society

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**PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD**  
**THE MOST REVEREND ANDREW P. WYPYCH, D.D.**



**THE MOST REVEREND ANDREW P. WYPYCH, D.D.**

**Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, Episcopal Vicar of Vicariate V**

Bishop Andrew Wypych answered the call to the priesthood in Krakow, Poland. He and his seminary classmates were ordained to the Diaconate in 1978 by Cardinal Wojtyla just before he was called to become Pope John Paul II.

Three years after ordination, Father Wypych left Poland for Chicago where his widowed mother was already living. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, he served at several parishes as Associate. In 1992, he was the first priest incardinated to the Archdiocese to be assigned as a Pastor and four years later, Cardinal Bernardin called on him to serve as the first priest of several to be Pastor of two parishes simultaneously – St. Pancratius and Five Holy Martyrs. He would later serve nine years as Pastor of St. Francis Borgia Parish and four years as Dean in Vicariate IV.

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Fr. Wypych to serve as an Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Bishop Wypych is the Episcopal Vicar of Vicariate V which covers 49 parishes and missions on the southwest side of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs.

Bishop Wypych is also the Executive Director of the Catholic League for Religious Assistance to Poland and Polonia. Under his leadership, the League (Liga) has expanded its efforts and created the St. John Paul the Great Scholarship which is awarded to deserving students of Polonia and priests studying in Rome. The Catholic League for Religious Assistance to Poland and Polonia offers new ways to bring Polonia together and keep it informed and active.





## ACADEMIC AWARD

### BOŻENA NOWICKA MCLEES

Ms. Bożena Nowicka McLees is a Polish literature and language instructor and director of Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at Loyola University Chicago. She earned her M.A. in Polish Language and Literature at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is experienced in teaching and developing Polish language, literature and culture curriculum. In addition to her work at Loyola, she has taught at the University of Illinois in Chicago and at Harper College.

Ms. McLees's academic interests include advanced Polish language courses and 20th century Polish literature, as well as maintenance and promotion of Polish language and culture in the Polish diaspora in America. She contributed to the following publications:

- Language Diversity in the USA, Polish in the USA: Cambridge University Press, 2010
- Five Poems from Vade-Mecum by Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Translation, The Polish Review, vol. XXVIII, no. 3, New York 1983

Ms. McLees has focused on connecting the evolving academic programs in Poland with the existing networks of schools, educational institutions and Polish American organizations in Chicago, to promote interest and understanding of Polish culture and the acquisition and maintenance of heritage language skills. She has collaborated with Poland's State Commission for the Certification of Proficiency in Polish as a Foreign Language in providing examination in the Polish language and with the Chicago's Sister City Warsaw Committee in leading the Educational Exchange Subcommittee. She was a co-founder and Board Member of the Jan Karski Educational Foundation, 2012-2015, and a co-founder of the Polish Film Festival in America in 1988. She also worked for the Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation, 1980-1984. Since 2016 she has been serving as the president of the PAC Education Commission.

In 2008 Ms. McLees was appointed Director of Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at Loyola University Chicago to further develop an academic program that meets the needs and aspirations of the Polish heritage students and non-Polish students who are interested in Polish language, history and culture. Under her leadership the Polish Studies Program <http://www.luc.edu/polishstudies/> has grown to offer 16-18 courses that enroll over 300 students per semester. She has organized and managed several scholarly conferences at Loyola University:

- Chopin & Paderewski 2010, November 11-13, 2010
- Jan Karski 2014 Conference, September 19-20, 2014
- Chicago Catholic Immigrants Conference: The Poles, November 13-14, 2015
- 75th Anniversary of the Polish American Historical Association Conference, September 7-9, 2018
- Roman Pucinski and Polish American Politics Conference, November 15-16, 2019



## BUSINESS AWARD

### MARK KOWALCZYK

Marek is a business entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in identifying business opportunities, launching and leading successful companies, developing products and solutions.

Founder and CEO of IDEA Furniture, Co. a Chicago based furniture Import Company. The company provides complete custom furniture solutions to end users and B2B, from design to manufacturing, building high- end products from natural eco-friendly materials, all imported from the European Union.

Founder and Managing Director at 5pm Ventures, LLC an investment firm specializing in early stage companies looking for capital and growth. He works with founders to achieve the highest performance standards through coaching and consulting.

Co-Founder and Managing Director of Chicago Poland Ventures LP, a cross border investment fund located in Chicago. The fund assists innovative companies in both the United States and Poland. The Fund targets early stage companies in a variety of industries that plan to grow in the EU market through a Poland location.

Marek is part of PLUS Connector Ventures, a Warsaw innovation center that assists US-based companies to expand into the EU market.

He is a seasoned angel investor in early stage companies with numerous companies in his portfolio. Marek is very active the Chicago Angel investment community and is currently a member of the Chicago ArchAngels group.

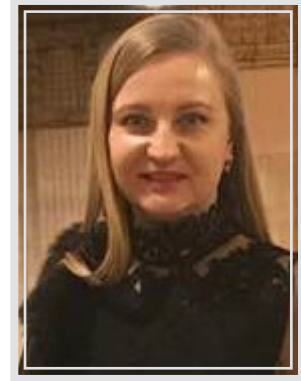
He currently serves on the Board of Directors at the Polish Museum of America and has served as a Vice President of International Business Affairs at Polish American Chamber of Commerce. He has served on a the Board of Copernicus Foundation from 2005 to 2015 as a Member and Treasurer. the Copernicus Foundation is a major civic, cultural, educational, and recreational entertainment not-for-profit organization.

He holds an Executive MBA from Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management, and a Bachelor of Arts in International Business from National Louis University. Married to Agnieszka and father of two girls who enjoys spending time with them. In his free time, he plays golf, travels, regularly visits Chicago Lyric Opera and rides his Harley.

## BUSINESS AWARD

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### AGNIESZKA KOWALCZYK



Agnieszka Kowalczyk is an entrepreneur, leader and philanthropist.

She is President of IDEA Furniture Co. which furnishes thousands of homes in America with European furniture, by introducing the latest trends and focusing on eco-friendly, sustainable merchandise.

Agnieszka is a member of Polish Women in Business, a not for profit organization working to advance professional opportunities and provide a supportive community for women. Polish Women in Business represents the interests of Polish American entrepreneurs across all industries.

Agnieszka served as Vice President of Polish Women in Business during which time she advanced the mission of the organization:

- strengthen the impact of women entrepreneurs in the economy
- built affiliations, business co-operation, and networking
- provided necessary training and information seminars to the members
- increased awareness of business ownership

In addition, Agnieszka supports many other not for profit organizations and is a Life member of Polish Museum of America, Life member of Copernicus Foundation and a member of the Legion of Young Polish Women. She has initiated numerous fundraisings and philanthropy events supporting the community.

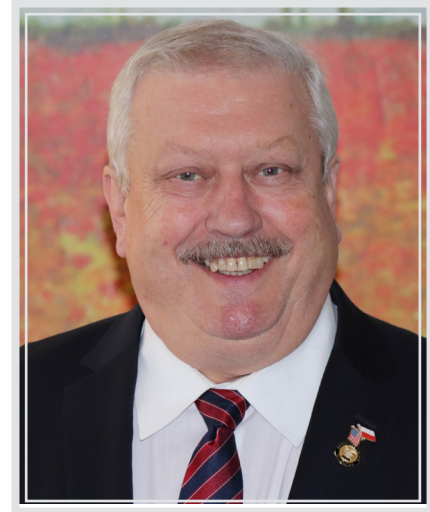
Agnieszka went to Warsaw University majoring in Early Childhood Development and Psychology. She achieved Certificate of Entrepreneurial Training System of Northwestern Business College in 2001. In 2015 she graduated from Emerging Leaders Initiative Program of U.S. Small Business Administration.

Agnieszka is happily married to Marek since 1999 and together raising two teenage daughters. She shares their passion for travel, theatre and Opera.

## CIVIC AWARD

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### KRZYSZTOF (KRIS) WĄSOWICZ



Krzysztof Wasowicz is the Mayor of Justice, IL. Kris and his wife Helen raised their sons in Justice, IL. He received his master's degree from the University of Krakow with a concentration in Biology. As Mayor he works diligently to promote the Village of Justice and has a very strong personal commitment to the Village. He maintains an "open door" policy for residents and employees alike. He strives to maintain an inclusive and transparent government that actively seeks the input of Village residents and businesses.

When he became Mayor of Justice, he inherited a Village that was over 7 million dollars in debt with no balanced budget. Through financially responsible decisions the Village is now solvent and has a balanced budget!

During his time as Mayor, he has been instrumental in obtaining over 43 million dollars in grant monies for the development of the Village and to address infrastructure. He works tirelessly to secure Economic Development in the Village including the Tollway project which he has worked on since 2007 and is moving forward. He is working on the Triangle property with Dunkin, Wingstop with additional restaurants being developed, and a hotel, retail and restaurant/banquet facility going up along 79th Street.

Kris has proven himself as a great community leader which is shown by the many improvements in the Village. As he says, "The future is bright, and we will continue to strive to make Justice the best community there is."



## Philanthropic Award



## Legion of Young Polish Women

On September 2, 1939, Helen Lenard Pieklo and a group of her friends founded the Legion of Young Polish Women (Legion Młodych Polek). Their initial purpose was to help the people of Poland in their time of need and the Polish diaspora caused by WWII. The Legion not only supported the Polish Government in Exile in London, but also early displaced Poles who escaped with nothing to free countries. These visionary women and those whom they inspired to follow their lead for over 82 years – all volunteers, then and now – have collected and donated over one million dollars to many worthy causes.

During World War II, the Legion sent food and clothing to Polish prisoners of war, and to the Polish Army Hospital in Great Britain in the form of medical equipment, hospital beds, and ambulances.

The Legion helps ensure that Polish culture, heritage, and traditions remain an integral part of our ethnically diverse country. The Legion helped to establish the professorship of Polish Language and Literature at the University of Chicago in 1961. In recent years, it supported the many schools, and cultural organizations.

For many years, the Legion has supported the young people of the Polish American community through substantial donations to the Polish Scouting Organization (Harcerstwo), Polish Language schools and dance groups, and to various scholarship funds. The needs of new immigrants from Poland are addressed through assistance to the Polish American Association and the Polish American Congress Charitable Foundation.

The Legion's concerns reach out beyond its ethnic scope, as evidenced by donations to the Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly, the Providence Soup Kitchen at St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Special Olympics, and the Salvation Army.

With the recent times, the Legion shifted its focus to provide more in-kind donations, not just financial support. With in-kind donations, the Legion was able to reach 40 new organizations within the last 2 years alone! Items donated included clothing, household goods, baby necessities, toys, electronics, food, and so much more. All items are always new, and the organizations truly appreciate the help. Since May of 2020, the Legion was able to help over 15,000 individuals with this new focus.

With the money it raises and the in-kind donations, the Legion supports Polish and American cultural and educational projects and thus the heritage of its members.



## President's Award

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## ANDREW SOCHAJ

Mr. Sochaj and his wife, Elzbieta, immigrated to Canada in the mid-seventies and in 1977 he began working as a machine operator at Cyclone. At the time, Cyclone Manufacturing, Inc., just outside of Toronto, was a small company with less than 25 employees in a facility of 24,000 ft. Their main business was the production of aircraft parts.

From his humble beginnings, he was quickly recognized for his expertise in machining operations by his fellow workers and more importantly by the company management. Over the course of 3 years Andrew was assigned more and more challenging projects to carry out and direct. In 1980 he convinced the owner of Cyclone, Mr. Ted Kosiorek, to purchase the first CNC machine - Computerized Numerical Control also known as the automated control of machining tools. He became the chief programmer and operator of the expanding CNC Department while the company refocused its direction to the exclusive production of aircraft components.

In 1990 Mr. Sochaj acquired ownership of Cyclone Mfg., Inc. and became its president. Under his leadership the company grew from the one facility to now six, with over 500,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space and over 800 employees. Two facilities are in Europe, one being in Krasnik, Poland.

Through hard work and dedication Andrew secured contracts and developed long term relationships with a number of world renowned Aerospace OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) such as AIDC in Taiwan and Lockheed Martin in the U.S.

Never satisfied with the status quo, Mr. Sochaj continues to be a leader in the industry through development, innovation and leadership. Andrew is a graduate of the University of Lublin, Poland and holds a Bachelor of Engineering degree. As a community leader and a patron of the arts he has always been involved in community service as well as the affairs of Polonia in North America and that of Poland itself. Mr. Sochaj, a proud father of 2 and grandfather of 5, has a strong belief in mentoring the younger generation to succeed. In fact, his son, Robert, has been with the company since 1992 and is currently the Executive Vice President. The next generation is in place to continue what Andrew Sochaj has been building for over 40 years!